

MARX'S CONTRIBUTION TO HUMANISM

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A RASH of literature on socialist humanism has followed the publication in English of Marx's youthful *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*.¹ Catholics as well as Protestants, Liberals, Democratic Socialists and Social Democrats, including Neo-Revisionists in Eastern Europe have discovered in Marx a champion of liberal values and of the dignity and freedom of the individual. Marx the economist, sociologist, historian and political scientist has been superseded by the philosophical Marx, who is currently listed among the world's great philosophers from Socrates to John Dewey. Thus, the highroad of Western culture has belatedly taken him into its bosom and claimed him as its own. Marx's struggles and writings on behalf of the nascent European labor move-

¹ See the translations of Martin Milligan (Moscow, 1956), and by T. B. Bottomore in Erich Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York, 1961) and selected translations therefrom in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (London, 1956) by Bottomore and M. Rubel, notably, Pt. I, chap. 2, Pt. III, chap. 4, and Pt. V. For a discussion and bibliography of current misinterpretations of Marx's early humanism see Dirk J. Struik's recent essay on "Marx's Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts," *Science & Society* (Summer, 1963). In his closing remarks Struik identifies Marxism with a socialist humanism in which the personal, ethical side of individual man is hardly less important than the contribution to political economy, history and the class struggle. Thus, even for him, humanism turns out to be a highly underrated instead of exaggerated aspect of Marx's thought.

A more realistic appraisal of socialist humanism appeared in the review article in the same issue on "Fromm, Marx and the Concept of Alienation" by Francis Bartlett and James Shodell. The consistent distortion that runs through most current interpretations of Marx's humanism is the neglect of the historical Marx, whose "central criticism of capitalism was not that it destroys individual personality but that it is incapable of solving the problems presented by the tremendous growth of the socialized productive forces," especially "the exploitation of the working class" (p. 323). Only at the price of distortion, only by severing Marxism from its historical associations with the labor movement, in other words, has it been possible to overcome some of the ignorance and unpopularity of its ideas.

ment might just as well not have existed. In this country the newly founded Society for the Philosophical Study of Dialectical Materialism has a far different image of Marx than did the original membership of the International Workingmen's Association. A casual observer might well conclude that the meetings of this Society have no relationship to the historical Marx.

If, on the one hand, Marxist ethics has become discontinuous with the actual history of the labor movement, it has also acquired an exaggerated continuity with the classical tradition in Western culture. To be sure, the terms "real humanism," "positive humanism" and "practical humanism" were used by Marx in his early works to distinguish his own value commitments from other varieties of humanism stemming from the French Revolution and Enlightenment.² But the term "humanism," like the related term "alienation," soon lost favor and all but disappeared from the writings of Marx and Engels, except as a term of abuse. In its place, the term "communism," and subsequently "socialism," came to designate their ethico-political program. This signified more than a simple change in nomenclature. For, breaking sharply with tradition, Marx and Engels drove a wedge between their brand of humanism and the philosophical or abstract humanism alien to the world of labor. Instead of stressing primarily the continuity between communism and traditional culture, this shift in terminology underlined their radical break with the past. Consequently, current references to socialist humanism are bound to be misleading, unless they stress the alien character of earlier humanisms and the elements of discontinuity within that tradition making Marx's humanism a radically new development of the human spirit.

I

It is well known that the word "humanist" was first used in the fifteenth century in Italy to designate the type of scholar not only proficient in Greek and Latin, but also committed to the values of the classics as opposed to the life-denying tendencies of what later came to be called medievalism. Only by an extension of its original meaning was it eventually applied to Greek and Roman culture itself. Nonetheless, the association of humanism with the humanities

² *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. M. Milligan, p. 164.

and liberal arts, with polite learning and the education of a gentleman, has persisted to this day. Central to the humanist tradition was the doctrine of the "good life," an ethic of self-realization, excellence and freedom, implying individual happiness and the all-round development of personality. Its classical maxim was "Nothing in excess," a formula of balance, moderation and decorum that lies at the heart of both ancient and modern humanism. This maxim is founded on self-knowledge, a psychology of the principal powers of man, their special functioning, and the techniques of habit and self-discipline required for their perfection. The humanist ideal of a self-aware and self-developed personality does not imply that man's powers are all equally worthy of development. On the contrary, the ideal of complete virtue has been traditionally interpreted to mean that the higher or intellectual virtues should have precedence over lower forms of self-fulfillment. Traditionally, the complete man was a product of a well-rounded education; nonetheless, a life of feeling and action has seldom claimed the dignity accorded to a life of reason.

In its classical origins, humanism appears primarily as an ideal of superior quality, selectiveness and exclusiveness, with complete indifference to the number of persons capable of sharing it—the ethical tradition of the *aristoi* or best. The classic trinity of the Good, True and Beautiful, the virtues of Plato's guardians, the Aristotelian intellectual and moral virtues, the cardinal virtues of the Scholastics, the Renaissance ethic of *homo universale*, down to and including Matthew Arnold's apotheosis of the Victorian gentleman—all testify to the identity of the "good life" with the vocations and avocations of the gentleman. From its inception humanism has represented the ethical values, interests and commitments of privileged individuals dedicated to leading noble lives. Its goal of self-sufficiency, freedom and development of human capacities has yet to become accessible to other classes. Its corresponding conception of justice—from each according to his capacities, to each according to his virtues—has historically benefited but a small minority. On the one hand, this principle has meant giving to each in proportion to his capacity for virtue.³ On the other hand, it stands for a principle

³ *The Republic of Plato*, trans. F. M. Cornford (New York, 1945), Bks. II. 376–III. 421; IV. 431–434, 441–444; VI. 502–VII. 541. Although aristocratic in origin, this

of distribution proportional to virtue actually acquired.⁴ In any case, virtue is attained only with great difficulty. It requires extensive breeding and education, long habituation, a measure of external goods or at least the conditions of leisure, and other necessary equipment.⁵

Contrary to current opinion, the most important virtues, like their material conditions, are scarce goods. Since the independent pursuit of culture requires both leisure and breeding, the virtue or happiness of the few has been historically dependent upon the labor and ignorance of the many. Leisure depends upon industrial exemption and the power to compel the labor of others; breeding requires tutors, who have to become cultivated in the first place. The humanist conception of the dignity of man and his ultimate aim, to become a complete human being, had a reverse side, the degradation of the majority into living instruments of a few supermen. But, as Engels notes in *Anti-Dühring*, it is easy to inveigh against slavery in general terms and to wax morally indignant over it. Realism requires a somewhat different estimate of its contribution to man's development: without slavery "no Greek state, no Greek art and science; without slavery no Roman Empire . . . without the basis laid by Grecian culture, and the Roman Empire, also no modern Europe."⁶ In other words, without the slavery of antiquity and its corresponding humanism, no modern socialism.

ideal is also common to modern democratic thought. See, for example, John Stuart Mill: "The first element of good government, therefore, being the virtue of intelligence of the human beings composing the community, the most important point of excellence which any form of government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves" (*Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government* [New York, 1951], pp. 259 f.

4 "Ethica Nicomachea," trans. W. D. Ross, *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon (New York, 1947), Bk. V: Ch. 3; and *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. E. Barker (Oxford, 1943), Bk. III: Ch. 9, §§ 12-15. This principle is also common to modern democratic thought: "This leaves, as the other constituent element of the merit of a government, the quality of the machinery itself; that is the degree in which it is adapted to take advantage of the amount of good qualities which may at any time exist. . . . The greater the amount of these good qualities which the institutions of a country succeed in organizing, and the better the mode of organization, the better will be the government" (Mill, *op. cit.*, pp. 259, 261-262).

5 See the education of Plato's guardians in *The Republic*, and Aristotle's discussion of the material equipment and social conditioning indispensable to virtue ("Ethica Nicomachea," Bk. I: Ch. 8; Bk. II: Chs. 1, 4).

6 *Anti-Dühring*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1959), p. 249.

Slavery was and always will be a reasonable cause for moral resentment; at the same time it was a necessary condition of social progress.

The question is whether the Marxian ideal of the freely developed personality is itself classical and aristocratic. Current critics of Marx's humanism have argued that it is manifestly not a proletarian ideal. The classical German outlook that underlay his early philosophical writings "rested upon a fusion of aristocratic and bourgeois elements—quite unlike the vulgar utilitarianism of Bentham and his followers which Marx thought so deplorable."⁷ Marx criticized bourgeois society, according to this view, in the name of a classical education and the aristocratic ideal of the Greek *polis*. However, despite its aristocratic origin, the humanist goal of the free or complete man, the "self-active" individual whose deeds are his own as the master of his own destiny, is not intrinsically alien to the ethos of submerged classes. For Marx and Engels, it ceases to be peculiar to a privileged class at that point in the development of society that renders the great mass of humanity propertyless, the system of exploitation intolerable, and the division of labor obsolete along with labor itself, at least in its compulsory forms.⁸ Historically considered, the chief obstacle to universal freedom is not the ruling tradition of ethical and cultural humanism, not the values of the proprietary classes, but the backward state of the productive forces relative to the requirements of human welfare.

II

Common to every variety of humanism is the emphasis upon self-perfection, the enrichment of personality and the all-round development of the individual. Yet the ruling ideals of human excellence and completeness have assumed a qualitatively different meaning with each major transformation in the mode of material production. In the realm of moral philosophy the differences challenge the similarities. Few great thinkers are completely representative of a given phase in the historical development of society. Nonetheless, in outlining the stages in the progress of humanism, it is revealing to contrast the thinking of such representative moral philosophers as

7 George Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study* (New York, 1961), p. 386. See also p. 401.

8 *The German Ideology*, ed. R. Pascal (New York, 1947), pp. 22–25, 66–69, 74–78.

Aristotle, St. Thomas, and John Stuart Mill on the nature of the good life. Although it may seem strange to include St. Thomas in this tradition, it is well to recognize that even God may be fashioned in man's image.⁹ Humanism is predicated on the Protagorean maxim, "Man is the measure of all things," but does not necessarily exclude religious sensibility. Far from defending the extreme of "otherworldliness," St. Thomas championed an early renaissance of classical values. By his revision of Augustinism in the light of Aristotle, by his reaffirmation of the natural virtues—especially the belief that man can attain a limited perfection without the assistance of grace—he established his position as one of the chief apostles of humanism during the Western medieval or feudal period.

In the tradition of classical humanism, Aristotle's conception of the good life was founded on a twofold distinction: (1) between the higher (intellectual) and lower (moral or practical) virtues; and (2) between liberal (leisurely or free) and banausic (mechanical or menial) activity. Some actions are better than others, especially those in accordance with the best and most complete virtue.¹⁰ Man's supreme happiness consists, first, in a life of pure reason or contemplation; and, second, in a life of practical reason conformable to his composite or typically human nature.¹¹ The best virtues are intellectual in character; the moral virtues belong to a lower order because they perfect man's inferior powers of action and passion. Furthermore, men are divided into two kinds: those capable of virtue and those incapable, who are "slaves by nature" even when legally free. The latter are built for bodily service and produce their best when they perform such service. Virtue cannot be attained by every citizen, but can only be achieved by those who are free from menial duties, to the exclusion of slaves who do them for individuals, and mechanics and laborers who do them for the community.¹² Indeed, manual laborers, both skilled and unskilled are denied the benefits of citizenship by the best constitutions, on

9 See Corliss Lamont's *Humanism as a Philosophy* (New York, 1949), which includes within the humanist tradition such varieties of religious humanism as the academic humanism of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, and the integral humanism of Jacques Maritain based for the most part on the doctrines of St. Thomas (pp. 31-32).

10 "Ethica Nicomachea," Bk. I: Ch. 7.

11 *Ibid.*, Bk. X: Ch. 7-8.

12 *The Politics of Aristotle*, Bk. III: Ch. 5. §§ 3-4.

the ground that "a man who lives the life of a mechanic or laborer cannot pursue the things which belong to excellence."¹³

This conception of the good life underwent a fundamental change in the hands of St. Thomas, who nonetheless acknowledged his profound debt to "The Philosopher." Like Aristotle, he subordinated the moral to the intellectual virtues, the active to the contemplative life. At the same time, he modified the Aristotelian ethic by arguing that the "mixed life," rather than a life of pure contemplation, is more perfect for both God and man: an "active life which leads a person by teaching and preaching to deliver to others the fruit of his contemplation is better than a way which stops at contemplation"—such was the life chosen by Christ.¹⁴ Yet higher than the goal of man's composite nature is his spiritual goal, which transcends his natural powers and requires divine aid. Such is the life in conformity with the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, of which the greatest is charity, the mother, root, and sum of all theological virtue.¹⁵ In effect, the caritative life perfects man's intellect and not only his will—a man loves God and neighbor because by faith he apprehends that God is good and commands his love.¹⁶ Since the theological virtues are infused independently of the human will, they do not depend on material equipment, leisure and the pursuit of natural excellence; in principle they are available to all men, at least to all social classes. Depending on the will of God, serfs, mechanics and manual laborers may be as privileged as any to share in the highest earthly beatitude. The divorce between theory and practice was less acute for St. Thomas than for Aristotle. Far from being intrinsically base, manual labor performed out of love of God is compatible with the highest virtue. Although man's highest faculty is reason, it is less perfect when perfected by philosophical wisdom than by humble faith and charity.¹⁷ Furthermore, it is not man's animal nature or sensuous life that de-

13 *Ibid.*, § 5.

14 *St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Texts*, ed. and tr. Thomas Gilby (Oxford, 1955), p. 266 (*Summa Theologica*, 3 a. xl. 1, ad 2).

15 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York, 1948), pp. 292-296 (*Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 62, Art. 2-4).

16 *Loc. cit.*

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-96 (*Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 12, Art. 13).

grades, but the will that gives precedence to the demands of sense in opposition to the commands of God.

This distinctly humanitarian thesis, that happiness is a function of love of neighbor or general sociability (St. Thomas) rather than friendship based on moral and intellectual accomplishments (Aristotle), was further developed by John Stuart Mill. Indeed, the principal obstacle to self-fulfillment or personal happiness is not want of mental cultivation, but selfishness.¹⁸ "To those who have neither public nor private affections," he wrote, "the excitements of life are much curtailed, and in any case dwindle in value as the time approaches when all selfish interests must be terminated by death: while those who leave after them objects of personal affection, and especially those who have also cultivated a fellow-feeling with the collective interests of mankind, retain as lively an interest in life on the eve of death as in the vigor of youth and health."¹⁹ When persons accomplished in the moral and intellectual virtues nonetheless do not find sufficient enjoyment in life, "the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves."²⁰ Although Mill follows Aristotle in distinguishing between a life of pleasure or contentment suitable for base persons, "fools," and "animals," and a life of reason or happiness corresponding to the higher faculties—it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied—he departs from tradition in elevating the social feelings of mankind to the category of a higher power.²¹ The process of civilized development results in a strengthening of social cooperation and a corresponding transformation of human nature, with the result that each individual has a stronger personal interest in consulting the welfare of others, and also an increasing need to identify himself with their happiness. Whether man likes it or not, the conditions of personal happiness depend increasingly upon the sentiment of sympathy and its fulfillment. The development of civilization tends to generate in each individual a feeling of unity with all people, regardless of race, color, class and degree of education, together with a compulsion to work on their behalf for the general social advancement. In

18 Mill, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12, 38-41.

a slave or feudal society, it is possible for a man of virtue to achieve self-fulfillment in conscious and deliberate disregard of the happiness of the majority of mankind; but with every step in social and political improvement it becomes increasingly difficult "to think of the rest of his fellow-creatures as struggling rivals with him for the means of happiness, whom he must desire to see defeated in their object in order that he may succeed in his."²²

Among recent philosophers, John Dewey has done perhaps more than anyone to formulate a new kind of humanism developing the social implications of Mill's philosophy. Like Mill, he stressed the value of shared experience, but went beyond him in integrating the sensuous and practical with traditional notions of the intellectual life.²³ Focusing upon the ideological elements in traditional theories of morality, he rejected Mill's notion of a final good or *summum bonum*. While arguing that every practical situation is unique in having its own irreplaceable good, he criticized the age-old presumption that ideal and so-called moral ends are invariably superior to material ones. At the same time he questioned the division of goods into intrinsic and instrumental, claiming that it is the principal intellectual source and justification for the preference for ideal over material goods.²⁴ Aristotle, among others, used this distinction to justify slavery in the interests of a commonweal of free citizens. In accordance with this distinction, manual labor appears to be exclusively instrumental, hence unworthy of intellectual, artistic and moral attention. Dewey rejected outright the thesis that a leisured existence is superior to a life of labor, arguing that there is in general no moral difference between "higher" and "lower" activities. Like Veblen, he adopted the perspective of technocratic man in his critique of the "polite conventions," "thin," "meagre," "idle,"

²² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²³ J. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York, 1920). See especially chapters 4-5 and 7-8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170. Historically, this criticism of the means-ends dichotomy can be traced to Joseph Dietzgen: "It will be sufficient . . . to understand that end and means are very relative terms, that all concrete ends are means and all means are ends. . . . The difference between means and end reduces itself to that between the concrete and the general." See his *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, trans. E. Untermann (Chicago, 1906), pp. 156-157.

"luxurious," "vain" and "socially irresponsible" ideals of traditional humanism.²⁵

While approximating the practical humanism of Marx, however, Dewey's version of naturalistic humanism is avowedly pluralistic. In our own day pluralism has become the ideology of a technocratic elite whose only end is problem-solving. Its perspective is scientific instead of laboristic; its choice of means, reformist rather than revolutionary. As a staunch pluralist, Dewey argued that "every case where moral action is required becomes of equal importance and urgency with every other," and that "anything that in a given situation is an end and good at all is of equal worth, rank and dignity with every other good of any other situation. . . ."²⁶ Believing that every practical problem requires the same intelligent attention and recourse to experimental methods, and that moral action and intelligent behavior are one and the same, he concluded that the amount of good in any situation is proportional to the amount of intelligence exhibited in solving problems. Since the application of intelligence or the experimental method is the chief condition of human growth, it should be applied in as many different areas as possible in order to enrich our lives. The process of growth is a process of becoming educated, a process of self and social reconstruction, ordered change instead of violence, accumulation instead of destruction, the amalgamation of the new instead of the sloughing off of old ways. There is no fixed end recognized by the experimental method other than problem-solving itself and, in the interest of growth, safeguards should be erected to prevent the choice of problems becoming the monopoly of any given class. Thus neither the ideal of a complete man nor that of a classless person is a final goal for Dewey, but rather growth itself is the only moral end.²⁷

III

In the development of humanism, the philosophical conception of the good life has finally overcome and left behind the classical

²⁵ Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176. A similar thesis was expounded by Dietzgen, the tanner, as early as 1869: "The most universal and most widely recognized right or need is in its quality no more rightful, better, or valuable than the most insignificant right of the moment, than the momentary need of some individual." *Op. cit.*, pp. 147, 157.

²⁷ Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

dichotomies of reason and sensibility, liberal and manual activity. Yet this movement has been a gradual one, for the most part, expressing preeminently the mentality of leisured and cultured classes. With few exceptions, manual labor and the sensuous life have not been accorded full equality, as conditions of self-fulfillment, with the liberal arts and a life of reason. It is precisely here that socialist humanism constitutes a radical departure from the humanist tradition. Although Dewey, like Mill, includes exposure to a variety of situations as a necessary condition of the highest and harmonious development of human intelligence, Marx was the first to place both sensuous experience and manual activity on a par with man's so-called higher powers. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, he associates labor—manual and practical, as well as abstract and intellectual—with the “essence of man,” and the sensuous, passionate and perceptible life of man with his “real existence.”²⁸ “In creating an objective world by his practical activity, in working-up inorganic nature,” man exhibits his uniquely human powers.²⁹ Although animals also labor, they labor under the domination of immediate physical need, “whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.”³⁰ Not only intellect, but also sensibility, the “humanity of the senses,” distinguishes man from other animals.³¹ Animals, too, are creatures of passion and sensibility, but not of sense and feeling emancipated from crude practical need.³² In brief, the fully developed human being is rich in intelligence and humanized needs, while “profoundly endowed with all the senses.”³³

On the basis of this philosophical anthropology, in which manual and sensuous activity are part of the essence of being human, self-fulfillment implies the overcoming of man's traditional self-alienation from his bodily functions and practical existence.³⁴ Especially noteworthy is Marx's decidedly unspiritual and even non-intellectual portrait of the good life in a communist society, where each can

28 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 75–76, 108–113, 152.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 75; italics deleted.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 108 f., 158.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 108–109.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

become accomplished in any field he wishes, thereby making it possible "for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."³⁵ Hardly less generous is Engels' description of the conditions of human happiness, including "means of subsistence, an individual of the opposite sex [especially important for Engels], books, conversation, argument, activities, objects for use and working up."³⁶

The founders of socialist humanism also went beyond Mill in stressing that the socially conditioned need for community cannot be fully realized short of a classless society. Since man is a social animal, he cannot find fulfillment, not to mention peace of mind, in estrangement from other persons.³⁷ This estrangement is a result of egoism or the crippling of the social affections, a symptom of the poor instead of rich personality. The greatest wealth of all, wrote Marx, is "the *other* human being."³⁸ Accumulation is the continuing preoccupation of man in a commercial civilization; yet with few exceptions, the more he *has*, the less he *is*.³⁹ To have more than others, you must spare yourself "all sharing of general interest, all sympathy, all trust, etc.; if you want to be economical, if you do not want to be ruined by illusions."⁴⁰ A completely selfish individual is free only in appearance: "He knows the realization of the *essential powers* of man only as the realization of his own excesses, his whims and capricious, bizarre notions."⁴¹ His life is empty and the consumption of no matter how much wealth is incapable of filling it. To be fully human he must be humane; yet the motive of those who engage in exchange is "not humanity, but egoism."⁴² In fact, one cannot buy love or trust with the power that money brings: "you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc."⁴³ If you want

³⁵ *The German Ideology*, p. 22.

³⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, ed. C. P. Dutt (New York, 1941), p. 38.

³⁷ *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 77 f., 125 f.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

to enjoy the love and affection of others (what sane man does not?), then you must become a loving and affectionate person. If you attempt to buy it or otherwise force it, you will love without evoking love in return; but, if your loving is not reciprocated, if you do not make yourself a loved person, "then your love is impotent—a misfortune."⁴⁴

Considering the humanitarian leavening in Marxian or socialist humanism, one may reasonably agree with the following estimate: "While adhering to a materialist base, Marxism actually strives to arouse idealistic motives such as are expressed in the willing sacrifice of personal comforts and possessions."⁴⁵ However, the author overstates his case by arguing that the ultimate objectives of Marxism are "ideal values," when the uniqueness of Marxian humanism is precisely its elevation of sensuous, practical, material enjoyments to the status of human dignity. As evidence for his thesis Dr. Slochower quotes Marx: "The proletariat regards its . . . independence and sense of personal dignity as more essential than its daily bread."⁴⁶ The relevant question is why it does so. Is it because "ideal values" are given precedence over so-called material ones, or is it rather because the abolition of exploitation is a necessary condition of the enrichment of man in all respects?

Erich Fromm is also correct, up to a point, in his recent appraisal of the humanitarian significance of socialist humanism.⁴⁷ Referring to the appeal of Marxism to the Asian and African countries, he notes that "socialism and Marxism are appealing not only because of the economic achievements of Russia and China, but because of the spiritual elements of justice, equality and universality which are inherent in Marxist socialism."⁴⁸ However, he, too, oversteps himself in arguing that Marx was less concerned with the abolition of exploitation than with overcoming man's spiritual poverty and condition of self-alienation—"the clerk, the salesman, the

⁴⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁵ H. Slochower, "The Marxist Idea of Change and Law," *Science & Society* (Fall, 1944), pp. 345-353.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 349. For the full excerpt from Marx's "The Communism of the Paper *Rheinischer Beobachter*," see Lewis S. Feuer, ed., *Marx & Engels: Basic Writings on Politics & Philosophy* (Garden City, 1959), p. 269.

⁴⁷ *Marx's Concept of Man*, pp. vii-viii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

executive [*sic!*], are even more alienated today than the skilled manual worker."⁴⁹ Thus not only was Marx's aim not limited to the emancipation of the working class; it was not even focused upon this emancipation. "Quite clearly the aim of socialism is man," writes Fromm.⁵⁰ Marx's humanist philosophy constitutes a "spiritual existentialism" in the tradition of Kierkegaard, while his atheism is "the most advanced form of rational mysticism [*sic!*], closer to Meister Eckhart or to Zen Buddhism [!!!] than are most of those fighters for God and religion who accuse him of 'godlessness.'"⁵¹ So interpreted, socialist humanism encourages "the realization of the deepest religious impulses common to the great humanistic religions of the past."⁵² As if this was not enough, he quotes Paul Tillich, the leading theological light and prima donna of contemporary Protestantism, for whom Marxian humanism is essentially "'a resistance movement against the destruction of love in social reality.'"⁵³ To be sure, socialist humanism constitutes a rebuff to the crude naturalism of the commercial spirit and "thinly disguised materialistic philosophy of our age."⁵⁴ Nonetheless, it is a gross exaggeration to associate Marx's doctrine, founded on sociological and historical materialism, with the idealistic tradition of "spiritual" or "humanist existentialism."

Like other recent interpreters of Marx, Fromm interprets his mature work, notably *Capital*, in terms of his early and, frankly, immature *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in which he still shows signs of his Hegelian apprenticeship.⁵⁵ Yet even in this early work there is little evidence for the view that Marx was "primarily concerned with the emancipation of man as an individual, the overcoming of alienation, the restoration of his capacity to relate himself fully to man and to nature. . . ."⁵⁶ Marx was undoubtedly concerned with each of these problems, but primarily in relation to a

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 50, 56-57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 46, 64; inserts mine.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1961); and Eugene Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (London, 1962).

⁵⁶ *Marx's Concept of Man*, loc. cit.

particular class, the oppressed and exploited wage-earners of industrial capitalism. His case for socialist humanism does not rest upon his humanitarian concern for all mankind, and to argue that it does is itself a reversion to pre-Marxian, "philosophical" or "class-less" socialism, a socialism that represents not the interests of modern laborers, but "the interests of human nature, of man in general, who belongs to no class, has no reality, who exists only in the misty realm of philosophical phantasy."⁵⁷

In our own day, philosophical or liberal socialists continue to be concerned with "the 'most reasonable' social order instead of with the needs of a particular class and time."⁵⁸ Both philosophical socialism and its recent progeny, socialist existentialism, stress the immediate relevance of the humanist goal of self-activity in opposition to the dehumanizing effects of modern capitalism. In contrast, Marxian or socialist humanism is unique in giving precedence to the more elementary, social and practical tasks of the labor movement at the expense precisely of a fully human or all-round development of personality—currently, either a luxury available only to a few or otherwise a distraction from the more urgent struggle to raise wages and improve working conditions.

IV

Perhaps this was the reason that led Marx to abandon in his mature works such a subjectively rich but misleading term as "humanism." In any case, this is the principal reason why Marxists have neglected and continue to neglect the personal, ethical side of individual man. Recently, in response to the pressures of atheistic existentialism in Poland and France, there has arisen a dialogue in which Marxists, too, have offered counsel on such problems of individual interest as the meaning of life, the destiny of man and his responsibility to society. However, if the interpreters of Marx wish to include a concern for these questions under the rubric of socialist humanism, then Marx is not their kind of humanist.

Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, identifies Marx's humanism with the philosophy of action or freedom expressed in the youthful

57 *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. F. Engels (New York, 1939), p. 36.

58 *The German Ideology*, p. 79; see also pp. 80-82, 96-98.

Theses on Feuerbach.⁵⁹ Of special interest to Existentialists is Marx's repudiation of the materialist doctrine which "forgets that it is men that change circumstances, and that the educator himself needs educating."⁶⁰ Sartre does not assign to man any permanent essence or human nature, but conceives of him as a "project." Man's self-surpassing is precisely what he calls the condition of freedom. Socialism is merely instrumental to the reign of freedom, to a new type of humanism "above and beyond the rational organization of the community."⁶¹ This new revolutionary humanism differs from all past humanisms by its struggle to abolish classes, by its efforts to unite all men. Is it, then, beyond parties and classes? No, because it is open at first only to individuals in the situation of oppressed persons.⁶² Through the agency of an oppressed class alone can it become manifest to the world. Yet this humanism is well suited to become a philosophy of all men, if, as Sartre believes, a ruling class enjoys at best an alienated freedom. The bourgeois is an indirect victim of his own oppression since, in order to maintain his authority, "he is obliged to pay with his own person and to become entangled in the image of [fetishistic] rights and values of his own invention."⁶³

On analysis, Sartre's brand of revolutionary humanism turns out to be a universalistic ethic of freedom, stemming from Kant and the principles of the French Enlightenment rather than from Marx. Sartre claims that freedom for one is impossible without freedom for all, that it depends upon a continuous struggle to surpass oneself along with the system of values current in society. Furthermore, it involves fighting for a new social order, continuing self-education and, above all, unceasing growth. Although Sartre's preoccupation with subjectivity and individual freedom suggests the other side of the coin of the Marxist's own struggle to transform society objectively, it is somewhat closer to the tradition of philosophical or "true" humanism satirized by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto*. Sartre's outlook endears itself to in-

59 J. P. Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, tr. A. Michelson (New York, 1955), pp. 213-214 n.

60 "Theses on Feuerbach," in Feuer, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

61 Sartre, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-230.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

63 *Loc. cit.*

tellectuals, artists, priests and prophets on the left rather than to actual workers involved in the day-by-day struggles of the labor movement. Although his social and political philosophy constitutes a major contribution to an historical materialism that furnishes in his own words, "the only valid interpretation of history,"⁶⁴ his existentialist ethic attempts to bridge the gap between the idealism of the philosophical tradition and the empirical orientation of the social sciences. In cleaving to the tradition of a Kantian community of ends, he sacrifices to that extent the realistic perspective of Marx and of the humanism associated with his name.⁶⁵

Sartre's particular brand of humanism has been challenged recently by Adam Schaff, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw and a member of the Central Committee of the Polish Working People's Party. He agrees this much with Sartre, that Existentialism poses moral questions of particular relevance to the individual, problems of personal responsibility for our actions and of duties to our fellowmen, which Marxists have neglected in the past. However, in his effort to provide a Marxist as distinct from an existentialist answer to these questions, Schaff also succeeds in misinterpreting Marx. Thus Marxist humanism is a variety of social hedonism aimed at maximizing happiness for the broad masses of the people.⁶⁶ In principle, there is little to distinguish this statement of humanism from Bentham's formula of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Like John Stuart Mill, Schaff also believes that personal happiness can be found only through the happiness of others.⁶⁷ The socialist humanist "advocates the class struggle in the name of love of near ones and of universal friendship, and he proclaims his hatred of the exploitation of man by man in the name of love of man."⁶⁸ Furthermore, "he accepts the precept of 'love thy neighbor,' and has only contempt for those who proclaim this beautiful precept in words and betray it in deeds."⁶⁹

64 Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. H. E. Barnes (New York, 1963), p. 21; see also pp. 33-34.

65 See Adam Schaff's criticism of Sartre's "Marxist Existentialism" or "Existentialist Marxism" in *A Philosophy of Man* (New York, 1963), pp. 24-45.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

68 *Loc. cit.*

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62; see also p. 106.

In this light, socialist humanism is the most recent link in the history of a humanist movement that goes back at least two thousand years. For Schaff, the fundamental goal of humanism has remained unchanged. Socialist humanism does not offer a novel goal, but only a novel instrumentality. To the common history and tradition of every humanism belong the "greatest philosophers and political leaders and revolutionaries . . . including prophets and religious leaders later canonized and worshipped even today like gods."⁷⁰ Despite a religious form, their teachings agree substantially with those of socialist humanists. The main distinguishing characteristic of socialist humanism is not its goal, which is common to traditional humanism, but rather its militancy.⁷¹ More precisely, the new humanism is at once the most radical and most realistic of all humanisms in its choice of means. It recognizes no competing goal or rival, no qualifying condition of its chosen end of "everything for the sake of man."⁷² It bases itself not upon moral sentiments or upon some fancied or permanent aspect of human nature, but for the first time in history upon a scientific theory of social development and the interests of definite social classes.⁷³ Humanist ideals heretofore thriving chiefly in the cloudcuckooland of abstruse philosophy and moral fantasy are brought down from heaven and rooted in the concrete social and political conditions of mother earth. However, Schaff fails to consider that socialist humanism is in effect a communism and that in the present stage of historical development its values are decidedly utopian, whatever their ultimate prospects.⁷⁴

Marx's humanism is somewhat richer and more original than his

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁷⁴ See the interesting comment by A. Otetea in a discussion on "Humanism and Our Epoch" by Athanase Joja *et al*, *Revue des Sciences Sociales* (Bucharest, 1960): ". . . the primordial condition of achieving integral humanism was the abolition of capitalist relations, which doomed the immense majority of people to an elementary struggle for ensuring their daily life. . . . Lenin showed that . . . this Communism, this integral humanism cannot be achieved by socialism all at once. . . . In this phase, socialism can guarantee to man only the resources which are in conformity with his ability. Socialism will be able to ensure and place at man's disposal all the means necessary to his development according to his needs, only in a subsequent stage . . . when man can indeed dedicate a large part of his time to perfecting his moral and intellectual features" (pp. 136-137).

critics have suggested. As we have already noted, socialist humanism has radically transformed the content of the humanist tradition by adapting it to the class of modern laborers. On the one hand, it is materialistic without involving a lowering of standards or de-emphasis upon the quality of human happiness. On the other hand, its aim is to raise the cultural level of the masses against the opposition of a privileged minority. Contrary to Marx's recent expositors, its contribution to traditional humanism includes the following: (1) its addition of a material, bodily, passionate and sensuous content to traditional humanism and the elevation of this content to the status of liberal activity; (2) its development of the social and humanitarian elements of traditional humanism; (3) its ascription of a definite class content to this tradition corresponding to particular historical phases in the development of production; (4) its formulation of the material conditions necessary to the universal realization of a humanist ethic, such as the abolition of exploitation; and (5) its rejection of the feasibility of a humanist ethic for the labor movement until the time that it becomes possible to build a classless or communist society.

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